

**SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH**  
**Linnet Tse (Mamaroneck UFSD) Notes for WPSBA 9/29/10 Forum**

**Keys Elements for a Successful Search Process**

- Selecting the right consultants as partners
- Ongoing communication that informs and manages expectations
- Involving all board members and all stakeholder groups
- Developing a schedule, working backwards from the desired appointment date and sticking to it brutally . . . it has to be every board member's top priority.
- Taking the time to be thorough in the interviews and due diligence process – DON'T SETTLE!!!

**Consultants**

What we did: used an RFP process; 6 firms submitted, interviewed 3 in person; did reference checks for all three. Selected Hazard, Young, Atea (HYA) – Bruce Dennis and Debbie Raizes.

**Key:**

- Consultants your board trusts, has confidence in and can work with comfortably
- Experience and broad and deep network also invaluable . . . both for identifying candidates and the secondary reference checks
- Make sure that consultants interview prospective candidates in person prior to recommending a short list to your board – greater likelihood of a good match

**Communication**

Ongoing communication is key to gaining trust, keeping all stakeholder groups informed as much as possible and managing expectations.

We used a combination of press releases, e-mail blasts to staff and community members, the website and updates at board meetings. HYA came to two board meetings, first to discuss the process and then to share the leadership profile report.

**Special communications initiatives that worked well:**

- At the outset, in July, created and posted Superintendent Search FAQs addressing the rationale for hiring a search firm, the need for confidentiality, the likely process including a rough timetable and the roles of the various parties.

## **SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH**

### **Linnet Tse (Mamaroneck UFSD) Notes for WPSBA 9/29/10 Forum**

Let stakeholders know upfront that we valued their input, but that it would have to be limited due to the highly confidential nature of the search.

- 5-6 press releases throughout the process: Dr. Fried's retirement, selection of a search firm, focus group dates, mid-way update (Feb) and the appointment announcement; email blasts mirrored the press releases.
- President and VP met with our 3 Assistant Superintendents at outset, and updated them regularly via email.
- Attended faculty meetings at each of our 6 schools in the fall explaining the process, rough timetable, and roles and inviting input via questionnaires/focus groups.
- Regular updates to our PTA Council

### ***Involving the Board and Stakeholders***

- ***Full board participation***  
Full board was involved for the entire process – no sub-committee. President chaired. All members were involved in every step from selecting the consultants to developing the process/timetable, planning focus groups, developing questions for the interviews, conducting primary and secondary reference checks, and the making the site visit.
- ***Focus Groups/Questionnaire***  
Consultants held over 35 individual, small group and open focus group discussions including two totally open meetings and one for the Latino community. These were used to develop the leadership profile which guided the search and served as a way of involving the community. We also had an on-line questionnaire and the same in hard copy – about 200 responses.
- ***Board agreement on essential characteristics***  
It's also critical to take the time to discuss the leadership profile as a board and agree on the essential characteristics, then keep referring to them as a guide. Remember, no one will be perfect.
- ***Advisory Panel***  
For final three candidates, involved a 7-member advisory panel and separately, the Assistant Superintendents. Both groups met with all three finalists and provided written feedback to the board – strengths, concerns or areas to follow up and additional comments. Board made it clear that their role would be

## **SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH**

### **Linnet Tse (Mamaroneck UFSD) Notes for WPSBA 9/29/10 Forum**

advisory only and they were not asked to rank the candidates. Advisory panel consisted of 2 building principals, 2 teachers including the union president, 2 PT Council co-presidents and an Assistant Superintendent to oversee the sessions.

#### **Be Thorough, Don't Settle**

##### ***General suggestions:***

- Board should not move forward if any members have any major doubts.
- Each board member should have veto power – if any one board member strenuously objects to a particular candidate, eliminate candidate.
- Take enough time to be thorough in the interview and due diligence process. Involve entire board in the primary and secondary reference checks.
- Don't make hasty judgments – keep an open mind and don't be afraid to change it. Listen very carefully to each other!

***Interview process:*** while our consultants suggested one round of interviews and a second one over dinner, knowing ourselves, we added a round. We interviewed six candidates in the first round, three in the second and had a third round of dinner/breakfast interviews with the three finalists. For the second round, we provided two “situations” (akin to case studies, relevant to our district) to the candidates and asked them: 1) to come prepared to discuss how they would approach situation A; and 2) to provide a written email response to a parent regarding situation B.

***Reference checks.*** Involve the entire board in reference checks. We did them individually and in teams. We spoke with board members as well as community and staff members in current and former districts.

***Talk through any concerns with the candidate*** – must start the relationship off on the right footing - an honest and open one.